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Pennings, Mark W. (2008) Mariko Mori: Tom Na H-iu. *Eyeline - Contemporary Visual Arts*(66):pp. 66-66.

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Mariko Mori

“Tom Na H-iu” Deitch Projects, 8/11 – 22/12/2007

Artists such as Pipilotti Rist, Olafur Eliasson, Matthew Barney and Mariko Mori are part of a new elite and act as creative directors and project managers. They outsource ideas to teams and companies that manufacture an array of installations, environments, performances, and sculptures. These are delivered to global art institutions, which are constantly hunting for novel interactions and experiences that are presented to mass markets. The success of this arrangement has generated substantial financial benefits for these practitioners and has enabled them to marshal considerable economic and creative resources. This has in turn generated new confidence and fuelled ever more grandiose and ambitious projects.

Mori's recent sculptures at Deitch Projects (2007) exemplified this trend. They were indeed the product of astonishing ambition, and unreservedly announced that she works at the high end of the luxury art market. Mori's conceptual aspirations were also impressive as her five sculptures boldly claimed to present a universal confluence of mystical pasts and magical futures that contained complex spiritual and scientific dimensions. The works referred to rituals and beliefs associated with life cycles and the transmigration of souls held by cultures like the ancient Celts and the Jomon. Mori also placed a futuristic spin on these elements, and her major piece, *Tom Na H-iu*, actually transmitted cosmological neutrinos recorded by the Super Kamiokande observatory in Japan.

As always, Mori's work is slick and no expense is spared in attaining the highest quality production values that the New York art scene expects. On entering the main space one came upon a kind of sanctuary-cum-domicile called *Flatstone* 2006. This consisted of white stepping-stones that were placed around a central circle and ceremonial urn. It resembled the kind of floor plan uncovered during an archeological dig and was based on the design of shrine entrances that were used by the mid-Jomon era people in Japan (3500-2500 BC). These important spiritual edifices were aligned with astronomical events, and Mori's allusion to ancient religions fostered a sacred and contemplative ambience. Another work, *Roundstone* 2007, was a large opalescent Lucite orb set upon a flat ground. This work related to mid-Jomon era stones found near fireplaces, as well as ancient “Standing Stones” that acted as doorways for spirits returning from the afterlife. The object also looked like a control panel from spacecraft seen in sci-fi films, as well as resembling an oracle that was about to reveal a message of great significance.

After consulting *Roundstone* one entered a darkened space that housed the monumental 4.5 metre *Tom Na H-iu* 2007. This luminous plinth-like object was the star of the show (literally!) and loomed as a mysterious and awesome sentry of this shrine-like environment. It was also reminiscent of the monolith in Kubrick's “2001 Space Odyssey”. As in *Roundstone* there was a sense of impending revelation and one felt that this vestigial monument was on the verge of communicating a message of great importance to the future of the human race. In actuality, this opalescent monument was a conduit for the universe's neutrino energies. These were relayed from an observatory managed by the Institute for Cosmic Ray Research at the University of Tokyo. Supernova explosions and dying stars emit neutrinos. When

these neutrinos were detected in space they were networked to *Tom Na H-iu*, which transmitted them as evolving LED colour light patterns. Each light corresponded to particular energies: atmospheric neutrinos were pale blue, solar neutrinos were green, neutrino bursts (supernova) were multi-coloured, etc. These lights flashed and twinkled in beguiling kaleidoscopic formations and suggested images that reminded me of Rudolf Steiner's Thought-Forms, scenes from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, or even the patterns of a lavish Lava Lamp. Such observations take nothing away from the impressive scale of this mighty monument as it presented an absorbing and powerful contemplative spectacle. Moreover, as a 21st Century conductor of universal cosmic rays it made Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Energy Accumulator look like something out of an amateur hour production.

What was most striking about the exhibition was that Mori was prepared to present herself as an astronomer/shaman who could capture and represent cosmological energies and eternal spiritual concerns. Only an artist at the top of her game would have the confidence and audacity to present such grandiose notions to an art audience. At times, the objects in *Tom Na H-iu* were indistinguishable from the religious icons that communicate sacred bodies of knowledge to the masses. In so doing, Mori used the future to return to the past for she offered a contemporary version of avant-garde genius and the idea that the art object contains an expansive world of meaning. We may have entered the era of post-avant-gardism, but Mori demonstrates that the artist's genius quotient is in revival mode. Moreover, this traditional artistic privilege has been supplemented by the right to enthrall and entertain a mass audience.

